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Husserl and Europe

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> *"Nothing is more foolish than to swear by the fact that the Greeks had an autochthonous culture, rather, they absorbed all the culture flourishing among other nations, and they advanced so far just because they understood how to hurl the spear further from the very spot where another nation had let it rest".*
> – Friedrich Nietzsche (KSA: 1.806)[2]

Phenomenology is one of the most influential philosophical traditions of contemporary philosophy. Alongside with post-structuralism, post-modernism and critical theory, phenomenology constitutes one of the key strands of the broadly conceived Continental philosophy. It has influenced such versatile traditions as philosophical hermeneutics and existentialism, and it is often employed in fields of cultural studies, comparative literature, archeology, and the cognitive sciences. Although phenomenology is often defined through its attachment to the first-person perspective, it has also become a central tradition in the fields of social ontology and political philosophy (see e.g. Zahavi 2001; Miettinen 2014b).

Phenomenology originated with the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). In his early

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[2] References to Nietzsche's Kritische Studienausgabe are abbreviated as KSA.

philosophical work *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901) Husserl introduced phenomenology as a method of investigating different forms of meaning in relation to their experiential "givenness". Husserl developed this idea into a theory of intentional acts as the foundation of all meaning – real and ideal, natural and cultural – and reformulated many of the central notions of modern transcendental philosophy to acknowledge the fundamental role of experience in our relation to the world. Although Husserl's vocabulary from the 1910s onwards followed Cartesian and Kantian traditions, he presented a rather unique theory of the transcendental subject as a temporally developing person and emphasized the role of others in its constitution. Husserl called this approach "genetic phenomenology" in distinction from his earlier, "static" analyses. (Husserl 1973a: 34–43. See also Husserl 1973b: 613ff. See also Steinbock 1998)

Although Husserl's phenomenology began as a fundamentally theoretical project with a rather heavy emphasis on the individual, his work was by no means indifferent towards topics of ethics and community. Especially since the 1920s onwards, Husserl frequently discussed questions of normativity and intersubjectivity, and began to develop a phenomenology of generativity (*Generativität*) that focused on questions of historical and intergenerational forms of meaning-constitution. (Husserl 1976: 190–192; Husserl 1992: 399, 424–426) The emergence of the well-known concept of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) in Husserl's later works was a result of these analyses. In his late work *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1992 [1936]), the life-world served as the fundamental and necessary point of departure for the phenomenological method. Phenomenology, in this sense, could no longer be exercised in the manner of Cartesian self-reflection but by examining the historically given prejudices and presuppositions.

The concept or idea of Europe played a double role in this development – and in Husserl's work in general. First, the political situation of Europe after the First World War provided a central impetus for the rethinking of phenomenology and the introduction of the themes of ethics, community and history. Phenomenology, in Husserl's view, could no longer remain a purely theoretical endeavor but was to provide a new foundation for the rearticulation of ethical humanity. (Husserl 1976: 59) Second, Europe itself became a central topic of investigation through which Husserl analyzed the historical or generative development of philosophy and its implications for the social sphere: What is the relation of philosophy to culture, history and politics? How does philosophy transform culture? Is philosophy itself based on cultural or geopolitical events? In order to do this, Husserl returned to the origins of European science in Ancient Greece.

Husserl's Europe, however, was not simply a particular entity. In a letter to Emanuel Radl in 1934, Husserl made a distinction between "empirical Europe" and Europe "in the spiritual sense" that was to be understood as a task. Europe, as Husserl understood it, denoted not only the realized history of a particular continent, but a more specific idea of cultural development animated by philosophical reason. (Husserl 1988: 241) Especially after the First World War, Husserl began to reflect upon what he considered as the cosmopolitan and universalistic calling of philosophical reason. In particular, Husserl wanted to preserve what he understood as the original motive of Western rationality, namely, its search for evidence and absolute foundations in the spirit of the theoretical attitude. This is not to say that the whole of European history would have followed this search for absolute foundations, but that the principle of universalism was indeed constitutive for its central accomplishments.

It should be emphasized, however, that this interpretation of Husserl as a universalist and a cosmopolitan is somewhat selective in that it disregards some of his earlier, more nationalist ideas. Particularly during the First World War, Husserl seemed like a typical German intellectual who wrote about Fichtean ideals of national liberation and the idea of "sacred war" (Husserl 1994: 402). "Death has again won back its holy primal right", Husserl remarked quite enthusiastically in his lectures on Fichte in 1917, "It is again the great reminder of eternity in time." (Husserl 1995: 112) As Karl Schuhmann has argued in *Husserls Staatsphilosophie* (1988), Husserl's relation to the problem of political community was at the end highly ambiguous. In contrast to his war-time ideas of nation and liberation, the 1920s marked a shift towards Kantian republicanism or what almost seems like a mixture of Stoic cosmopolitanism and socialist internationalism. In his post-WWI essays, Husserl began to use concepts such as *Übervolk* and *Übernation* in connection to what he called a "communistic unity of will" (Husserl 1988: 53). The emergence of Europe as a supranational unity of peoples was linked to this shift of position.

This article is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the topic of Europe in relation to Husserl's well-known concept of the crisis. Husserl did not invent this topical notion but formulated its key premises anew in order to analyze the specific dispersion of modern scientific reason. Instead of passive submissiveness, the crisis was to be understood as a positive call for action and as an indispensable tool of Husserl's teleological-historical reflections. The second part focuses on what Husserl considered as the origin of his idea of Europe, that is, the birth of philosophy in Ancient Greece. What interests us here is how Husserl analyzed the transformatory role of philosophy in regard to culture. Philosophy, according to this view, was not a matter of the individual but contained within itself a cultural and historical dimension; it was born out of the insistence to

overcome the natural limits of one's own "homeworld". Philosophy itself was a geopolitical event that laid out a completely new type of horizon for the development of culture. The third part focuses on the political consequences of this idea. While philosophy emerged from the close interconnectedness of Greek city-states, it was also able to formulate a new understanding of the political community.

Philosophy and the European Crisis

Husserl's reflections on Europe took their point of departure from the idea of crisis. Especially in his works of the 1930s, Husserl spoke frequently of the crisis of "European humanity", of "European sciences" and also simply about the "crisis of Europe" (Buckley 1992; Moran 2000). This crisis was to be understood in two regards. First, it referred to the decline of European culture and values that followed the profound destruction of the First World War. In these years it was particularly the concept of crisis that became one of the central symbols to describe the sense of an acute turning point, the loss of foundations, or even an irreversible demise of the European culture. Husserl himself experienced this crisis on both professional as well as personal level – he lost his son Wolfgang on the battlefields of Verdun in 1916 – and was later academically isolated as the National Socialists came into power in 1933.

This crisis, however, was not purely a series of institutional setbacks but a deeper loss of meaning that concerned the very foundations of phenomenology. As Husserl wrote in a letter to Fritz Kaufmann: "Because of it [the inception of the First World War] I lost the continuity of my scientific thread of life, and if I cannot work productively, understand myself, to read my manuscripts but without bringing them to intuition, then I am badly off." (Husserl 1994: 340) Husserl seemed to be referring not

only to scientific ideas but also his wartime reflections on the historical task of the German nation. In any case, the task of phenomenology was no longer simply to provide an ontological or epistemological foundation for the sciences. It was to strive towards a more comprehensive "rational reform of community". (Husserl 1988: 5) The idea of Europe played a key role in this.

Secondly, Husserl employed the notion of crisis also in a more limited sense to describe a deep dissatisfaction in the development of modern science. (Husserl 1976: 20-41) Especially through Galileo's discoveries, mathematical reasoning became the central model of all scientific rationality, and the natural sciences gained a prominent position as the basic paradigm of all science. The dominance of a particular type of rationality – the mathematical and the natural-scientific – led to a gradual dissolution of the natural and the human sciences, and a general confusion concerning the unity of sciences. Human sciences such as psychology, anthropology or history with their interpretative methods were seen as being primarily subjective or lacking the hard objectivity of exact sciences.

This "hostility towards the spirit" (*Geistfeindschaft*), as Husserl called it, had significant normative implications. (Husserl 1976: 347) Scientific reason became gradually irrelevant for questions of good life and politics. Science dissociated itself from ethics or morality, which could no longer be interpreted as having any objective validity, but rather, they were seen as being first and foremost subjective apprehensions on how things should be. On a more general level, the natural-scientific revolution with its belief in the deterministic character of the world had undermined the fundamental "faith in the freedom of the human being." (Husserl 1976: 11) In Husserl's view, what Europe lost was indeed the faith in the idea of reason as a source of human renewal and science as the moral compass of humanity.

The crisis of Europe was a crisis of philosophy, though not in the narrow sense of particular theories or individual ideas. Instead, it was a crisis of a particular vision of philosophy as the "spiritual organ" of humanity. (Husserl 1988: 54)

How should we understand this expression? Europe, for Husserl, was primarily a culture of scientific reason. This did not mean that the history of Europe would have been all about scientific discoveries but in the sense that scientific rationality was in fact constitutive for culture as such (see Gasché 2009: 21ff.). The idea of science born in Ancient Greece was not simply one branch of culture among others – art, technology, religion etc. – but something that animated the whole development of culture. For instance, it was exactly science or scientific rationality that enabled Christianity to constitute itself as a theology with its fundamental truths and axioms. What philosophy introduced was not simply a method of observation but a practical task that strove to ground the development of culture in rational insight. This was not to say that the whole of European history from colonialism and imperialism to industrialized capitalism could be described as a simple triumph of reason, but rather that this tendency towards systematization was an underlying feature of the European culture.

This meant that the ongoing crisis of the European sciences and reason could only be understood and addressed by returning to the origins of Europe, that is, to the birth of science and philosophy in Ancient Greece. In line with his late method of "teleological-historical reflection" Husserl called this event the "teleological beginning [and] the true birth of the European spirit." (Husserl 1976: 72) It is crucial to note that the concept of teleology did not entail any kind of historical determinism, but a method of inspection directed at the historical descending of ideas. To understand the present as teleological means that it is not absolute but rather depends on a series of acts that

fundamentally define our possibilities of thinking and acting. Unlike in the Hegelian sense, for Husserl the teleological-historical method did not aim at a justification of the present but at "liberation" (*Befreiung*) (Cf. Husserl 1976: 60). It is only through a comprehensive account of the past that one is able to have a grasp of those ideas and presuppositions that define the present moment and limit our possibilities.

In this regard, Husserl's discourse on the crisis differed rather substantially from many of the dark visions of his own time. Unlike for Oswald Spengler (1991), for instance, the crisis of Europe was not a sign of the irreversible "decline of the West" but rather a call for action that motivates itself from the fundamental loss of meaning. The "crisis of European existence", Husserl wrote, "is not an obscure fate nor an impenetrable destiny. Instead, it becomes manifestly understandable against the background of the philosophically discoverable *teleology of European history*." (Husserl 1976: 348)

> [This crisis of Europe] has only two possible outcomes: either the ruin of a Europe alienated from its rational sense of life, fallen into barbarian hatred of spirit; or in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy, through the heroism of reason that will definitively overcome naturalism. (Husserl 1976: 348)

Judging from today's perspective, it might be concluded that Husserl's analysis on the clear-cut choice between "barbarian hatred of spirit" and the "heroism of reason" was indeed a kind of hyperbole that exaggerated the possibilities of philosophy to decide on the course of culture. Although the 10 years that followed this statement from 1935 were absolutely decisive for European societies, it might be said that this period did not resolve the fundamental philosophical conflict between

phenomenology and naturalism. Instead, Husserl himself seemed to fall victim to a kind of "heroization of the present" that Michel Foucault (1984: 34) once defined as the basic logic of crisis.

Nevertheless, it is evident that for Husserl, the use of the concept of crisis in regard to the problem of Europe was not a dark prophecy of an irreversible destruction. Instead, the crisis served as a call for action in hope of a better future. This entailed, however, that the current crisis of European rationality was to be "uprooted" (*entwurzeln*) by returning to its origins (Husserl 1976: 317). These origins, in Husserl's view were to be found in the Classical period of Ancient Greece:

> Spiritual Europe has a birthplace. By this I mean not a geographical birthplace, in one land, though this is also true, but rather a spiritual birthplace in a nation or in individual men and human groups of this nation. It is the ancient Greek nation in the seventh and sixth centuries BC. Here there arises a new sort of attitude of individuals toward their surrounding world. And its consequence is the breakthrough of a completely new sort of spiritual structure, rapidly growing into a systematically self-enclosed cultural form; the Greeks called it philosophy. (Husserl 1976: 321)

This return, however, was not to be understood in terms of romanticized nostalgia. Although the Greeks conceived philosophy in terms of a rational life that strives towards best possible evidence, they were in many ways unable to live up to this ideal. Despite its demand for universality, Greek philosophy was defined by a number of naturalistic or traditional prejudices. Plato founded his ideal *polis* on a questionable division between producers, soldiers and rulers that had its origin in nature;

Aristotle excluded both women and slaves from the full sense of reason (*logos*). What the Greeks articulated, however, was an understanding of philosophy that was not simply limited to the sphere of individual consciousness. As Husserl put it, philosophy was a spiritual structure that articulated itself as a "cultural form" (1976: 321). Its birth was closely tied to the existence of a variety of cultural contexts, competing political systems and worldviews. Instead of one ruling *hegemon*, philosophy started from plurality, and it was particularly this feature that provided the key for the overcoming of the European crisis.

Greek Philosophy and the Birth of Europe

Husserl's reflections on Greek philosophy were based on two competing ideas. First, Husserl understood philosophy as arising from the general geo-political and geo-historical situation of the Greek city-states at the wake of the Classical era (see. e.g. Held 1989; 2002). Those forms of thinking we call philosophical emerged against the backdrop of a series of political, societal and religious transformations in the 6th century BC and they fundamentally changed the cultural landscape of Greek societies. Rapid economic development and maritime trade led to new cultural interchange as well as growing tensions between social classes. Solon's constitutional reforms of the early 6th century aimed at resolving some of these tensions and provided the institutional setting for the emergence of Athenian democracy. As Athenian citizenship was extended also to non-indigenous people, Athens became the center of commercial and cultural exchange (See e.g. Andrews 1967: 197ff.). Thus, the birth of philosophy was inherently tied to the abundance of different cultures, world-views, ideas and practices:

> Naturally the outbreak of the theoretical attitude, like everything that develops historically, has its factual

> motivation in the concrete framework of historical occurrence. In this respect one must clarify, then, how *thaumazein* (wonder) could arise and become habitual, at first in individuals, out of the manner and the life-horizon of Greek humanity in the seventh century, with its contact with the great and already highly cultivated nations of its surrounding world. (Husserl 1976: 331-332)

As Husserl emphasized especially in his later works, the Platonic-Aristotelian model of philosophizing was not a matter of purely personal endeavor. Rather, philosophy emerged as a form of communal activity, a philosophizing-together, that was inextricably tied to the multitude of perspectives. (Husserl 1976: 326) Philosophy was not born *ex nihilo* but was "motivated by the pre-philosophical lifeworld." (Husserl 1992: 347) As Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 88) once put it, the geopolitical situation of the Greek city-states was in fact defined by the absence of a hegemonic empire that provided "a taste for the exchange of views." Moreover, the Athenian society with its institutionalized forms of public debate provided a fertile ground for the emergence of philosophical debate.

Secondly, philosophy itself was by no means indifferent with regard to historical, cultural and geo-political transformations. Philosophy also articulated itself as a transformation in the social and political sphere. This did not only mean that philosophy expressed itself in the form of a political program – a set of institutional demands as in the case of Plato's *Republic* – but that philosophy enabled a completely new type of communal imagination. "Under the title of philosophy", Husserl wrote, "is the idea of rigorous science out of free reason the overarching and all-embracing idea of culture." (1988: 89) Besides being a specific attitude of an individual, philosophy gave way to a new type of "political historicity" (*politische Geschichtlichkeit*) (1992: 15)

that fundamentally transformed the temporal and geo-political imagination of a particular community.

This effect of philosophical reason can be described with the concept of *universalism* that can be understood in two senses. First, Greek philosophy was universal in its insistence to "bracket" or suspend the validity all particular cultural perspectives. Unlike other cultural practices that defined themselves according to unique cultural features such as Etruscan pottery or Doric architecture, philosophy laid out a field of study – the totality of beings and their most general categories and features – that was essentially one and the same despite changing cultural contexts. As Aristotle put it in his *Metaphysics*, a philosopher must advance from the position that different thinkers, despite changing vocabularies, actually speak about the same matters. (Aristotle *Met.* I.5, 987a10–11) No single language or culture has an advantage in regard to the basic task of philosophy.

Since 1920s onwards Husserl developed this idea of cultural contexts into a comprehensive theory of different "normative" frameworks. He did this with the concepts of "home" and the "alien" and the respective notions of "homeworld" and "alienworld" that described the basic experience of familiarity characteristic of the lifeworld (Steinbock 1995: 173ff.; Waldenfels 1998). The concept of the homeworld was to be understood in terms of a shared cultural territory (*Kulturterritorium*) which involves a consciousness of its uniqueness with regard to its outside. As Husserl insisted, "home and alien designate a difference in understanding" (1992: 42) – the familiarity of a particular lifeworld is based on its intelligible character, which is always delimited in regard to that which is unintelligible, that which is unfamiliar and strange. Instead of a merely contingent feature, the division between home and alien was actually a "permanent structure of every world" (1973b: 431).

Philosophy was an event deeply tied to a transformation of the homeworld. In Husserl's view, philosophy emerged from the observation that no single culture has an advantage when it comes to questions of the real world. In an essay "Teleology in the History of Philosophy" (*Teleologie in der Philosophiegeschichte*), Husserl emphasized the centrality of the critique of mythology to the emergence of the theoretical attitude. "The Greeks were keen to despise the barbarians", Husserl wrote, "the alien mythologies that signified such an important dimension of the practical environment in the alien as well as in the own people, and [they] considered them even as barbaric, stupid, or profoundly wrong." (1992: 387). According to a popular etymological consideration, the Greek word '*barbaroi*' was derived from the seemingly incomprehensible speech of alien people (e.g. the Persians). See e.g. Waldenfels 1997: 22) However, even the mockery and ridicule that the Greeks leveled at foreign mythologies failed to remove the Greeks fascination for their similarities and analogous ways of seeing the world, "the same sun, the same moon, the same earth, the same sea etc." (1992: 387) Alongside the "territorial myths" characteristic of particular homeworlds – for instance, the tales of Philomela and Oedipus among the Greeks – there emerged a novel sensitivity towards "universal myths" that referred to universally shared features of the lifeworld such as the earth, the sky and the heavenly bodies. (1992: 43–44)

Secondly, philosophy was also universal in the sense that it addressed all rational subjects despite their cultural, ethnic or social origins. Philosophy idealized the very notion of community as it delineated an idea of a human collective that was not limited to a particular historical community. This "supraspatial and supratemporal sociality" (Husserl 1992: 395) was thus universal in a new, emphatic sense: it was potentially inclusive of all rational beings, including those who had yet to be

born. In contrast to "political" communities, which relied on the difference between friend and enemy, the philosophical community knew only friends. Its defining characteristic was a fundamental openness towards not only all living human beings but also towards future generations.

Philosophy realized this universalistic calling by imagining a completely new type of cultural objects: *ideas*. From early on, Husserl resisted a typical interpretation of Platonic idealism as a theory of another world and followed Herrmann Lotze's insights on validity and normativity: for Plato, Husserl argued, "ideas were taken as archetypes, in which everything singular participates more or less 'ideally,' which everything approaches, which everything realizes more or less fully; the ideal truths belonging to the ideas were taken as the absolute norms for all empirical truths." (Husserl 1976: 291) Especially practical ideas such as "the state" or "the human being" were understood as normative models that can only be approximated and approached in concrete action. Unlike the accomplishments of everyday practices, ideas were not exhausted in the course of worldly time; rather, they were able to surpass the perishability of the real world.

From a generative perspective, the emergence of theoretical ideality brought about not only a new class of cultural objects but also a completely new *horizon of production*. In contrast to the kinds of worldly practices where different projects and goals follow one another in temporal succession, the theoretical attitude gave birth to a class of ideal goals that can never be fully attained in concrete action. Conceived of as a universal task that deals with the totality of beings, philosophy disclosed an area of pure idealities and infinite horizons where each every single truth is only given a relative status in respect to the complete task.

Unlike the accomplishments of everyday practices, the products of theory were not exhausted in the course of worldly time; rather, they were able to surpass the perishability of the real world. In other words, theory opened up a completely new level in the intergenerational constitution of meaning which was able to remain unchanged despite the historical and cultural circumstances, for the theoretical attitude "produces in any number of acts of production by one person or any number of persons something identically the same, identical in sense and validity." (Husserl 1976: 323) Historical periodization was no longer conceived of an obstacle to the identical transmission of sense, because the universal tradition of philosophy was able to function as the absolute plane of perpetual creation of sense. This was what Husserl called the revolutionary effect of science and philosophy:

> Scientific culture under the guidance of ideas of infinity means, then, a revolutionization [*Revolutionierung*] of the whole culture, a revolutionization in the very manner in which humanity creates culture. (Husserl 1976: 325. Translation modified. On this point, see also Schuhmann 1988: 159ff.)

This revolution is perhaps best understood through Husserl's repeated definition of philosophy as an "infinite task" (*unendliche Aufgabe*), a concept that Husserl adopted from the neo-Kantians. (Husserl 1976: 72, 324, 336ff.; Husserl 1992: 408, 421) Instead of a simple "doctrine" (*Lehre*) that could be passed on to new generations, philosophy introduced the idea of cultural accomplishment in the form of a *formal project that could not be simply rendered in the form of substantive content*. Philosophy, which was itself born out of the relativization of all traditions, did not simply replace the traditionality of the pre-philosophical world by instituting a new tradition; rather, it replaced the very

idea of traditionality with a new kind of *teleological directedness* or "teleological sense" (*Zwecksinn*) that remains fundamentally identical despite historical variation. (Husserl 1992: 34) This universal teleology does not recognize any physical borders: it invites everyone to fulfill its goals.

The intrinsic corollary of this singularity was of course the essential *sharedness* of philosophical accomplishments. Although theoretical insights can be classified according to their origin, as in the case of the Pythagorean Theorem, due to their purely ideal character, the products of theory cannot be possessed by anyone. In one of his *Kaizo* essays, Husserl actually described the philosophical community as fundamentally communistic. (Husserl 1988: 90, 377) Theory, as a form of production, was not only critical towards all imperialistic constellations based on a central will; it also revealed a field of accomplishments that was common to all.

> Unlike all other cultural works, philosophy is not a movement of interest which is bound to the soil of the national tradition. Aliens, too, learn to understand it and generally take part in the immense cultural transformation which radiates out from philosophy. […] philosophy, which has grown up out of the universal critical attitude toward anything and everything pre-given in the tradition, is not inhibited in its spread by any national boundaries (*Schranken*). (Husserl 1976: 333–335)

It is exactly here that we are able to comprehend the cultural and geopolitical transformation that philosophy produced. Philosophy, through the infinite horizon of ideal truths, was able to articulate itself in the new forms of *historicity and generativity*. By understanding itself in regard to a horizon of production which is absolutely singular, philosophy was able to project the

idea of universal historicity – a temporal horizon which is absolutely singular and which is not exhausted in the course of worldly time. This is what Husserl meant with his idea of Europe: On the basis of the new idea of sharedness, philosophy gave rise to a novel form of territorial universalism that was willing to overcome all generative divisions between home and alien, i.e., it was a movement that was willing to *transcend all cultural limits.* As Novalis once put it, it was "the desire to be everywhere at home." (Novalis 1993 [1798]: 434 (fr. no. 857).

Europe and Political universalism

Understood against the background of the birth of philosophy, Husserl's idea of Europe was a prospect of a political community that would go beyond the traditional ideas of nation and state, an idea of community inherently critical towards all pre-established limits of culture or ethnicity. Motivated by the generative transformation in the categories of "homeworld" and "alienworld", philosophy aimed at articulating a novel idea of political communality that was inherently critical towards all natural divisions of familiarity and strangeness. For Husserl, the essential transitivity and contingency of these divisions was indeed the most important lesson of the political history of Europe:

> Yet this essential difference between homeliness and alienness (*Heimatlichkeit und Fremdheit*), a fundamental category of all historicity that relativizes itself in many strata, cannot suffice. Historical mankind does not always divide itself up in the same way in accord with this category. We feel this precisely in our own Europe. There is something unique here that is recognized in us by all other human groups, too, something that, quite apart from all considerations of utility, becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their

> unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation […]. (Husserl 1976: 320)

What Husserl described here was a process we would perhaps nowadays call globalization, that is, the dissolution of cultural limits. Indeed, from Hellenistic cosmopolitanism to Catholic universalism, from medieval crusades to modern imperialism, the will to overcome cultural and ethnic limits has been an integral part of European history (see Miettinen 2014a). Europe has not simply accepted existing limits between home and alien, but it has worked towards their dissolution with both ideas as well as by force. Here, Husserl's description of the will of non-Europeans to "Europeanize themselves" was of course naïve and historically misrepresenting: while "European" ideas and institutions have been taken up by others, this has obviously not been a harmonious process. Indeed, in the preface to the *Crisis*, Husserl did in fact speak of the "historical non-sense" of the actually existing Europeanization that seemed to refer to the perverted forms of European universalism (1992: 14, see also Gasché 2009: 47).

Still, Husserl was willing to defend the argument according to which the birth of philosophical reason entailed a transgression not only in the European context but in the framework of universal history:

> This means nothing less than that we grant to European culture […] not just the highest position relative to all historical cultures but rather we see in it the first *realization of an absolute norm of development*, one that is called to the task of revolutionizing all other cultures in the process of development. (Husserl 1988: 73)

It is quite understandable that one might read passages like this as simple justifications of the violent expansionism of the

European culture. This has been the interpretation, for instance, of Jacques Derrida who has paid attention to the "logic of exemplarity" in traditional discourses on Europe. Although Derrida formulates his criticism in several of his works – from the early works on Husserl's genesis to the later reflections on the state of Europe (*L'autre cap*) – the content of this criticism has remained the same in essence: "Europe has always confused its image, its face […] with a heading for world civilization or human culture in general." (Derrida 1992: 24) Against this logic, Derrida argues, "it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, but of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other." (Derrida 1992: 29)

Derrida's criticism, I believe, has its own justification. As I would like to argue, however, what characterized Husserl's return to the Greek idea of political universalism was exactly his insistence to create a kind of counter-strategy to the modern tradition of substantial universalism. Rather than presenting us what could be called a *universalised particularism* – the assumed universal applicability of certain particular dogmas as in the case of modern theories of natural law – the Greek universalism provided us with a counter-motive, namely, *the de-absolutization of all particularisms* pointing towards a non-substantial account of culture. What Husserl considered the key insight of Greek political universalism was exactly the idea that the "absolute norm" of cultural development cannot be derived from empirically existing cultures; rather, it was to be located in the structure of human rationality as such. As Husserl put it in an appendix to *Erste Philosophie*:

> Philosophy emerges without a tradition in order to establish a tradition. […] Philosophy wants to be

> "science", universal science of the universe; in all of its different systematic forms, it wants to be general according to the absolutely valid truth which binds all of those who are capable of intuitive evidence. (Husserl 1959: 320)

Ultimately, in the midst of rising nationalistic sentiments, Husserl put his hope in the idea of Europe as a tradition of critique and renewal. The main adversary of this idea, however, was the idea of Europe as an actually existing history – a substantive account of culture only to be defended and protected against foreign influences. What Husserl wanted to revitalize was indeed the idea of Europe as a "tradition without a tradition", a culture that is able to resist all particularistic interpretations of an exclusive heritage – or the idea that the foundation of culture could be located in a clearly defined notion of "a people". This idea of Europe, however, was – and still is – more like a promise than an existing history.

Conclusion

This article consisted of three parts. First, I argued that the concept of crisis that played the central role in Husserl's late reflections on Europe. Through the concept or *experience* of the crisis, Husserl rearticulated his project in order to account for the societal and cultural dimensions of phenomenology. Although the crisis itself was linked to the First World War, its origins were to be found in the dispersion of scientific rationality that characterized the whole of modernity since Galileo. The crisis of Europe was nothing less than the inability of cultural renewal on the basis of best possible evidence. Second, I showed that Husserl's understanding of Europe relied on a genealogical analysis that traced the origins of this "cultural form" back to the Classical period of Ancient Greece. Instead of an individualistic endeavor, Husserl analyzed the birth of philosophy as a

geopolitical event that relied on transformations in the idea of lifeworld. Moreover, philosophy created a completely new type of class of objectivities – the ideas – and visioned a never-ending horizon for their perpetual creation and critique. By doing so, it simultaneously imagined a completely new type of being together, that of a *universal community*. Finally, I discussed the political implications of this idea. Although Husserl rarely touched upon the political implications of phenomenology, his relation to the idea of universalism seemed to be twofold. On the one hand, Husserl acknowledged the original motive of political universalism in the dissolution of cultural limits; on the other hand, he treated the actually existing history of European universalism – the propagation of ideas and norms to other cultures – as fundamentally flawed. What Europe had lost was the fundamental element of *negativity* that characterized the original idea of universalism as the critique of all particular cultural frameworks.

Thus it is possible to claim that Husserl's reflections on Europe aimed at a rearticulation of the principle of universalism, but with regard to three central qualifications. First, the idea of universalism was to be understood as a fundamentally formal, not substantive idea. It characterized merely those general conditions on the basis of which we are able to understand each other and the world, to reach a common agreement by means of rational insight. Second, the idea of universalism was to be understood as a dynamic principle whose content is constantly open for rearticulation. This is why Husserl emphasized the idea of "infinite task" as constitutive for philosophy. Thirdly, and perhaps most surprisingly, Husserl understood universalism as a deeply pluralistic idea whose existence necessitates the co-existence of several competing (normative) frameworks. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty put it in his late works, it was exactly idea of plurality that characterized – not only Husserl's reflections on Europe – but his phenomenological project as a whole:

> Certainly nothing was more foreign to Husserl than a European chauvinism. For him European knowledge would maintain its value only by becoming capable of understanding what is not itself. What is new in the later writings is that to think philosophically, to be a philosopher, is no longer to leap from existence to essence, to depart from facticity in order to depart from facticity in order to join the idea. To think philosophically, to be a philosopher – in relation to the past, for example – is to understand this past through the internal link between it and us. (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 89)

Perhaps Husserl's reflections on Europe ought to be read as an invitation to engage in a critical reflection with both our own tradition as well as what lies beyond it. Rather than being a defense of "European" values, ideas or norms, Husserl provides us with an understanding of Europe that fundamentally develops on the basis of plurality and openness towards the alien. It is an understanding of culture not as a thing or an achievement but as a process that also has the potential to renew itself.

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